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Reveal.Com: Tesla Underreported Employee Injuries

Liz Carey

Fremont, CA (WorkersCompensation.com) – Tesla underreported employee injuries and didn't follow standard safety procedures, according to a report by the Center for Investigative Reporting's Reveal.com.

According to Reveal.com, the automotive company failed to include injuries for temporary workers, as well as injuries the company determined were from "personal medical" causes, on legally required documentation. In many cases, the report said, the company failed to report serious injuries that required days off of work, in order to make the company's injury rate better than it actually was.

In 2018, Tesla's VP of Environmental, Health, and Safety, Laurie Shelby, said in a release that Tesla had improved its Total Recordable Incident Rate by nearly 25 percent over 2016, and was on track to be below industry average for 2018.

She attributed many of Tesla's injuries to "ergonomic issues caused by repetitive tasks."

But according to the report, Tesla has been cited by the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health for more than 40 violations since 2013. According to OSHA, Tesla's rate for serious injuries that required time off or job restrictions was 83 percent higher than the industry's in 2016.

State safety officials have cited Tesla eight times since 2013 for deficient training, the report said.

The report alleged that safety guidelines such as yellow to outline pedestrian areas, and warning beeps on forklifts to indicate they are backing up, were not required in the plant because company founder, Elon Musk, disliked yellow and the sound the forklifts made.

In a resignation letter, one former safety officer recounted how she told her supervisor “that the plant layout was extremely dangerous to pedestrians.” In her letter, she indicated her supervisor told her “that Elon didn’t want signs, anything yellow (like caution tape) or to wear safety shoes in the plant” and that it “was a mess.”

Tesla has more than 10,000 workers at the electric car maker’s facility in Fremont, CA. According to records, the company has recorded 722 injuries in 2017, approximately two per day. According to the report, employees have been “sliced by machinery, crushed by forklifts, burned in electrical explosions and sprayed with molten metal.”

In response to the report, a Tesla spokesperson referred **WorkersCompensation.com** (<http://www.workerscompensation.com/news.php>) via email interview to a company blog post. The company’s statement on the report categorized it as part of a “ ideologically motivated attack by an extremist organization working directly with union supporters to create a **calculated disinformation campaign against Tesla** (<https://www.foxbusiness.com/politics/tesla-corporate-campaign-costs-uaw-hundreds-of-thousands>).”

The company said “Our goal is to be the **safest factory on Earth** (<https://www.tesla.com/blog/becoming-safest-car-factory-world>). Last year, despite going through extreme challenges building an entirely new Model 3 production system, we nonetheless reduced our injury rate by 25%. Through a lot of hard work, our injury rate — which we diligently track, record, and update — is half what it was in the final years GM and Toyota owned and ran the same Fremont factory before it closed and Tesla took it over.”

Additionally, the company said it encourages managers and supervisors to err on the side of the employee.

“To ensure we are being as accurate in our reporting as possible, we want our managers and supervisors to err on the side of assuming that an injury is work-related when it is first reported by an employee,” the statement read. “Moreover, the law requires that you start from this assumption. After a thorough review with a third-party medical professional, it sometimes becomes clear that what initially was thought to be work-related (and described as such) is in fact personal. As with any case, as information is provided that affects the classification, we update the log accordingly. This is not unusual to Tesla and is common across industries.”

The blog also asserted that the idea there was an aversion to the color yellow was “ridiculous.”

The company also said it cared deeply about its employees and would continue to strive toward a high level of safety.

“This is not to say that there aren’t real issues that need to be dealt with at Tesla or that we’ve made no mistakes with any of the 37,000 people who work at our company,” the company said in its statement. “However, there should be absolutely no question that we care deeply about the well-being of our employees and that we try our absolute hardest to do the right thing and to fail less often. With each passing month, we improve safety further and will keep doing so until we have the safest factory in the world by far.”

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